Community, Week 4

Small Group Discussion Guide, week of Oct 12th

OCT 12TH SERMON SUMMARY

Radically Inclusive Community (Book of Philemon)

Being a place where anyone can experience grace means being open to everyone, not limited, welcoming anyone God sends our way. How can we voluntarily, freely, cheerfully choose to become more inclusive and welcoming? (Philemon 8-9, 13-14; 2 Cor 9:7)

1. Consider the blessings (v. 6), all that you have. Contentment enables us to love and give.

2. Consider the individual (v. 7-10), who God created him/her to be, what God is doing in his life, what she's becoming, how God values him, and what God wants to do in her life.

3. Consider the cost (v. 18-20), money, time, energy, discomfort, frustration, etc. Count the cost, and compare it to the cost others (family, church, Jesus) have paid for you.

As we consider these 3 things and are honest in community, we will grow to become more inclusive. We love the people we can, and trust God and be honest about the ones we can't.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION: Share briefly about a time that you felt welcomed, included, or accepted.

IL THINK AND REFLECT.

Read Philemon 12-21, below.

12 I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. **13** I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. **14** But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. **15** Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— **16** no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. **18** If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. **19** I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. **20** I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. **21** Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

1. Think about Onesimus.

   a. What do you know about Onesimus from these verses? What can you infer about:

      - who he was and what he's become
      - how Philemon sees him
      - how Paul sees him
      - how God sees him

   b. Why did Paul send Onesimus back? What risk did Paul take in doing so?

2. Think about Philemon's response in receiving the letter and hearing it read in the church.

   a. What were Philemon's choices?

   b. Imagine Philemon's thought processes as he made this hard decision. What would he have thought about in considering:

      - the blessings?
      - the individual?
      - the cost?

   c. What do you think Philemon decided to do? Or what do you hope he decided? Why?

> Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love ….. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. (Philemon 8-9, 21)

3. In the last few weeks, we have talked about our difficulty in loving "tax collectors", sinners, and hard-to-love people we know. Think about those people.

   a. Discuss Erik's statement that welcoming hard-to-love people is voluntary. Agree or disagree? How does this help you?

   b. Paul is confident of Philemon's eventual obedience as he considered the blessings, individual, cost, as he trusted God, and was honest in community. How can those (or other) things help you grow to welcome and include others?

c. What would it mean for you to be “radically inclusive”? For us as a church?

III. PERSONAL APPLICATION (Choose 1 of the following if time is limited)

4. As you have listened, discussed, and thought about community in the last few weeks, how has God been speaking to you about any hard-to-love people in your life?

5. What do you want to trust God for, as you grow in community?

6. **What do you need Jesus to do for you today?** This is a good guiding question for your prayer time.

As you share prayer requests and pray for one another, remember to try to share about your own needs; try to work toward sharing from the heart, instead of talking about the needs of others. Your small group really wants to support and pray for YOU, more than they want to pray for your relatives, friends, and neighbors.